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From: EDKOCDEAF@aol.com

Sent: Sunday, February 29, 2004 8:42 PM

To: Michael Powell, Kevin Martin, Kathleen Abernathy, michel.copps@fcc.gov,
johathon.aldestein@fcc.gov, Thomas Chandler

Subject: Video Relay Service

February 29, 2004

CC-98-67
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Dear FCC Commissioners,

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

I have been asked to write to you on behalf of the California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCASDHH). We are a coalition that consists of 8 agencies statewide and also include a representative from the California Association of the Deaf.

It has come to our attention that the FCC is about to make a decision regarding a Video Relay Service that has recently become available for the Deaf. CCASDHH supports the options for various communication needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. We are deeply disappointed to learn that the FCC considers VRS an "optional" service and not a "mandatory" service to be provided by the TRS providers. We are asking you to make this a "mandatory" service that TRS providers must provide.

In your website, www.fcc.gov/realaudio/presentations/2004/011504/cgb.ppt under Access by People with Disabilities states "Comprehensive review of the TRS providers data resulted in significant reduction of Video Relay Service reimbursement rate and savings of millions of dollars for the U.S. telecommunications rate payers." As a result of this, VRS providers have cut their hours and services to the Deaf community. The deaf community now cannot use VRS service 24 hours a day. In this same website "Not a One-Way Street" you claim that you have solicited input from consumers. We have never been contacted or know of any deaf person that have been contacted about the use of VRS. Therefore we feel that the FCC is making decisions on their own rather than expanding outreach to the underserved stakeholders (e.g. people with disabilities, rural communities) as stated in your "2003 Goals".

Some of the TRS providers have provided VRS for over two years as an "experimental" program. These providers have proven to you that there is a need for Video Relay Services. Some of the CCASDHH agencies have the set up to allow consumers to use the D-Link equipment or webcams. We have seen a great need for this service mainly among consumers who have very limited English skills and Sign Language is their main mode of communication. With the use of VRS, deaf people become more independent and can communicate their needs effectively through sign language.

We are also asking that you require ASA and other means of quality control to be applied to the Video Relay Services by the TRS providers.

Thank you,

Ed Kelly, Chair
California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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